

October 9, 2019

To: Richmond Town Manager and Selectboard:

The Planning Commission requests that a full-time planner be hired to replace Jess Draper, who we understand is leaving to take a planning position in Plattsburgh.

We feel that a full-time position will attract applicants that can provide us with the expertise and the dedicated time that we need to continue with our important zoning update work, as well as continue our strong relationship with CCRPC; identify and manage planning grant opportunities, and work with Town committees engaged in planning activities for housing, transportation, economic development and management of natural and historic resources. In addition, there is more need than ever for planning guidance as we transition towards the less car-dependent and more energy-efficient future that is envisioned in our Town Plan, the regional ECOS Plan, and by state efforts to reduce fossil fuel usage 90% by the year 2050.

With Jess's assistance and guidance, we were able to develop and bring to a successful town vote our updated Town Plan, and together we have made progress towards bringing badly needed revisions to our zoning regulations. This is not an easy process. Beyond expertise, the process requires constant outreach to entities such as the Richmond Zoning Administrator, DRB and Selectboard; neighboring town officials and planners; state and community agencies, and emergency service providers. In order to continue with this rewrite process, we will need similar capabilities and available hours.

Research time for the planner is also needed for the zoning effort. New developments such as short-term rentals, marijuana facilities and self-storage units are already on the radar and will need background work before the Planning Commission can make rational choices about their regulation; and new energy and forest regulations enacted into state law will require new understanding before they can be reflected in our zoning. Jess's time has also been available to citizens, developers and community groups, and we feel that this important community service and educational resource should continue to be available, even though it is time-consuming.

In addition, we would like to request that Jess be kept on the payroll in a part-time position or on a contractual basis until a new full-time planner is hired. This will allow for our ongoing zoning work to continue, provide for a smooth transition to a new team and keep the Planning Commission on top of any other obligations we might have in the coming months.

In summary, while we understand that there is always competition for resources, we feel that planning plays such an essential role in Richmond's present and future that a full-time planner is fully justified.

Thank you for your consideration.

Richmond Planning Commission
Virginia Clarke, Vice Chair